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WHAT WOMEN THINK ABOUT WORKING

WOMEN'S BUREAU C.N.E. SURVEY

Number 5

What Are The Occupational Horizons of To-Day's Women?

In the summer of 1968 the Women's Bureau at the Canadian National Exhibition interviewed a total of 1459 women and girls about their occupational beliefs and preferences. The answers of those who were 20 years old and under were compared with the answers of those who were over 20. It was found that many in both age groups shared the traditional idea that working women belong in a limited range of lower level occupations. In fact, the occupational views of teen-aged girls appeared to be more restricted in scope than those of women over 20. The older group tended to believe that women could go higher on the job and succeed in a wider range of occupations than did the teen-agers. Even though about half of both groups felt that women could do top level jobs, and many expressed preference for "pioneer" kinds of jobs, counselling for young girls apparently has not yet gone far enough to free them from traditional stereotypes and unnecessarily restricted aspirations.

PART 1.

How High Can A Woman Go In Her Job?

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to elicit current attitudes toward women's advancement in the work world. A range of jobs was selected to represent upper, middle and lower levels of responsibility and training in 6 different work settings -- in a department store, a hospital, a data processing office, a newspaper, a bank, and a high school. In each case, both groups were asked to signify whether or not a woman could do the job well if she were interested. The jobs were presented on the questionnaire in scrambled order rather than in order of importance, so that the respondents would judge each job individually. It was found that:

The higher the level of responsibility and training demanded by a particular job, the less often was that job selected as one that a woman could do well.

The women and girls interviewed were nearly unanimous in their belief that a woman could do each of the lower level jobs, but only half of them felt that a woman could handle the higher level administrative or trained specialist jobs in the same fields.

TABLE 1. Jobs A Woman Could Do Well

Work Setting		Lower Level		Higher Level
Department Store	Salesclerk	96%	General Manager	60%
Hospital	Nurse's Aide	97%	Head Surgeon	48%
Data Processing Office	Key Puncher	91%	Director of Computer Operations	56%
Newspaper	Reporter	93%	Managing Editor	55%
Bank	Teller	97%	Bank Manager	54%
High School	Teacher	97%	School Inspector	64%

The women over 20 were consistently more generous than the teen-agers in their appraisal of women workers. The difference was slight at the lowest level jobs, but increased in magnitude as the jobs became more skilled and responsible.

- 94% of the teen-agers and 97% of the over-20's felt that a woman could do lower level, non-administrative work such as salesclerk, nurse's aide, key punch operator, reporter, teller, or teacher.
- 84% of the younger group and 90% of the older ones said that women could do well in middle level jobs such as personnel director, computer programmer, columnist, accountant or head of a high school science department.
- 53% of the teen-agers and 64% of the over-20's felt that a woman could handle a high level job such as general manager of a department store, hospital administration, director of computer operations, managing editor, bank manager, or school inspector.

A girl who does not believe that a woman can do well at a particular job, even if she is interested in it, is not likely to choose that job or be receptive to training for it. This is disturbing if we consider that these younger, less aware people are currently making crucial educational and occupational choices. Older women, although still quite conventional, appear to be more aware of women's potential and capabilities than the younger ones.

In both age groups the number of women who were uncertain or unable to make up their minds was highest when the decision concerned women's ability to handle the upper levels of employment. About 15% were undecided about each of the highest level jobs; 6% were undecided about the middle level ones; and only 2% couldn't make up their minds about the lowest level ones. Younger girls were slightly but consistently less certain about all occupations than were the over-20's. This probably reflects their lesser familiarity with employment titles and job content.

Both groups showed the same pattern of assessment, despite the greater confidence of the older group in the abilities of women. Both were least likely to feel that a woman could do well as a head surgeon in a hospital and most likely to feel that she could be a good bank teller or high school teacher. The only major difference of opinion between the two groups occurred with respect to the position of bank manager. Less than half of the teen-agers (48%) thought women could do this job well, compared with 68% of the over-20's.

Finally, both age groups were substantially more willing to believe that a woman could do well in the commonly observed female occupations than in the less common ones. This suggests that increased use of visual aids such as film, personal appearances and excursions to places where women are performing non-traditional work will be more effective in widening girls' occupational horizons than the use of the printed word.

PART 2.

What Careers Should A Girl Consider?

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to determine the current preferences of women for traditional or pioneer occupations and to provide some indication of the range of occupations women consider appropriate for themselves. The women and girls were presented with 18 matched pairs of occupations and asked to select from each pair one occupation which they preferred. The occupations were matched roughly according to skill level and status so that they differed mainly with respect to their traditional or pioneer character. It was found that:

The women and girls interviewed were predominantly conventional in their choice of occupations. When given the chance to choose one occupation that they would



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personally prefer from each of the 18 paired "traditional" and "pioneer" occupations, they selected traditional "women's" jobs over pioneer ones by a wide margin, in 11 cases. As shown in Table II, 7 "pioneer" occupations were relatively popular. The ones actually preferred by both groups were:

policewoman over bank teller (70% of the women)
computer programmer over bookkeeper (70% of the women)
archaeologist over librarian (62% of the women)
doctor over director of nursing (56% of the women)
newspaper photographer over news reporter (52% of the women)
court reporter over executive secretary (51% of the women)
audio-visual technician over nurse (51% of the women)



TABLE II

Choice Between Traditional and Pioneer

Traditional	Pioneer	Majority Choice	% Choosing* Traditional
<u>TRADITIONAL</u>			
psychologist	aeronautical engineer	psychologist	84
fashion artist	architectural draftsman	fashion artist	81
interior decorator	landscape architect	interior decorator	80
social worker	professional engineer	social worker	80
child care worker	dental hygienist	child care worker	79
dietician	dentist	dietician	74
hairdresser	electrician	hairdresser	72
home economist	forester	home economist	70
office machine operator	motor mechanic	office machine operator	71
high school teacher	pharmacist	high school teacher	64
<u>PIONEER</u>			
executive secretary	court reporter	court reporter	49
nurse	audio-visual technician	audio-visual technician	49
news reporter	news photographer	news photographer	47
director of nursing	doctor	doctor	44
librarian	archaeologist	archaeologist	37
bookkeeper	computer programmer	computer programmer	28
bank teller	policewoman	policewoman	29

*In each case a small percentage, usually 1-2%, were undecided as to whether they preferred the traditional or pioneer choice.

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In all but three cases the majority in both age groups favoured the same occupation. As shown by Table III, these three exceptions occurred when the younger group favoured executive secretary, nurse, and news reporter in contrast with the older women's choices of court reporter, audio-visual technician and news photographer.

TABLE III. Percentage Preferring Traditional over Pioneer Occupations, By Age Group

Traditional	Pioneer	20 and Under	Over 20
psychologist	aeronautical engineer	85%	88%
fashion artist	architectural draftsman	85	78
interior decorator	landscape architect	82	80
social worker	professional engineer	83	79
child care worker	dental hygienist	82	76
dietician	dentist	74	73
hairdresser	electrician	75	66
home economist	forester	69	72
office machine operator	motor mechanic	73	68
high school teacher	pharmacist	69	51
hairdresser	watchmaker	65	60
executive secretary	court reporter	51	44
nurse	audio-visual technician	54	44
news reporter	news photographer	45	51
director of nursing	doctor	46	42
librarian	archaeologist	35	40
bookkeeper	computer programmer	30	24
bank teller	policewoman	28	31

Table III also shows that in 13 out of 18 paired choices more of the teen-agers chose the traditional occupation than did the older women. For example, 69% of the teen-agers chose high school teacher over pharmacist, compared with just 51% of the over-20's. Also, considerably more teen-agers than over-20's chose hairdresser over electrician, fashion artist over architectural draftsman, nurse over audio-visual technician and child care worker over dental hygienist.

In all, there were only 5 pairs of occupations in which the over-20's proved to be more conventional than their teen-age counterparts. However, even in these cases, the difference between age groups was slight and not sufficient to counter-act the overall evidence that the teen-agers were more bound by conventional, stereotypical restraints on their work choices than were the women over 20 and that both groups shared an unnecessarily restricted view of women's place in the labour force.



